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DE RUEHNK #0580/01 2571339
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
P 141339Z SEP 09
FM AMEMBASSY NOUAKCHOTT
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 8763
INFO RUEHZK/ECOWAS COLLECTIVE
RUCNMGH/MAGHREB COLLECTIVE
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON 0849
RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS 1204
RHMFISS/COMSOCEUR VAHINGEN GE
RHMFISS/HQ USAFRICOM STUTTGART GE

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 NOUAKCHOTT 000580

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 09/08/2018
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [KDEM](#) [PREL](#) [MR](#) [SNAR](#)
SUBJECT: MAURITANIA: POLITICAL ROUNDUP FOR AUGUST 2009

REF: A. NOUAKCHOTT 549
[1](#)B. NOUAKCHOTT 386
[1](#)C. NOUAKCHOTT 538

Classified By: CDA Dennis Hankins for reasons 1.4 (b and d)

[1](#)1. (U) Summary: The month of August saw Mohamed Ould Abdel Aziz, author of the August 6, 2008 coup d'etat, become the legitimately elected President of Mauritania. Aziz also received a visit from the Iranian Minister of Foreign Affairs and traveled to Libya on his first official visit. Tagadoumy journalist Hanevy Ould Deha's imprisonment and SOGECO's three million dollar fine cast a shadow on Aziz's promise of a fair and inclusive government. Two tons of hashish were seized, a drug dealer was arrested and drug lord Eric Walter made shocking accusations about drug-trafficking in Mauritania. End summary.

[1](#)2. (U) Aziz is inaugurated President: On August 5, almost a year following the August 6, 2008 coup d'etat against President Sidi Ould Cheikh Abdallahi, Mohamed Ould Abdel Aziz was inaugurated President of Mauritania. Senegalese President Abdoulaye Wade, Malian President Amadou Toumani Toure and French Secretary of State for Cooperation Alain Joyandet were among high-level guests at the ceremony, which was boycotted by most of the opposition.

[1](#)3. (C) "Passif humanitaire" victims divided over settlement: In a public declaration following President Aziz's inauguration ceremony, a dissident faction of the victims' association COVIRE highlighted deficiencies in the resolution of the passif humanitaire (the term used to encompass the human rights legacy of the expulsion and repression of Afro-Mauritanians in the late 80's and early 90's) and the need to re-define repatriation conditions for those refugees remaining in Senegal. PolOff met on August 24 with COVIRE President Sy Abou, Secretary General Sidibe Abou, and Widows' Committee representative Aissata Alassane Sarr, who stated that the communique was published by a group that had been expelled from the association and not by COVIRE. They declared themselves satisfied with the settlement and said they plan to continue working with President Aziz to bring justice to the victims of the 1989 purges of Afro-Mauritanians.

[1](#)4. (U) Iran-Mauritania relations: On August 13, Iranian Minister of Foreign Affairs Manouchehr Mottaki arrived in Nouakchott for a two-day working visit. According to Mottaki, the Iranian Red Crescent will soon build a hospital in Mauritania. He indicated that the construction of this new hospital is motivated by Aziz's and Ahmadinejad's desire for stronger bilateral ties, particularly in the fields of medicine and education.

[1](#)5. (U) Regional counter-terrorism meeting: On August 12, Army Chiefs of Staffs from Algeria, Mali, Mauritania and

Niger agreed on a strategy to coordinate the fight against terrorism in the Sahara. The Ministry of Defense stated in a communique that the meeting "aimed at reinforcing military and security cooperation."

¶6. (U) Military appointments: On August 18, General Mohamed Ould Mequett was appointed Director General of External Security and Hanena Ould Sidi was appointed Inspector General of the Armed Forces and of Security.

¶7. (U) AQIM claims responsibility for attack: Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb issued a statement claiming its responsibility for the suicide bomber attack on August 8 against the French Embassy in Nouakchott. The statement explained that this terrorist act was directed against "the French crusaders who constantly hurt Muslims around the world" and is also a message addressed to the "dictator Aziz, who continues to attack and imprison young Muslims in the Islamic land."

¶8. (U) Taqadoumy journalist convicted: On August 19, journalist and Taqadoumy Director Havevy Ould Deha was sentenced to six months in prison for opening a forum allowing the publication of opinions contrary to Islam and common decency (Ref A).

¶9. (C) A politically motivated fine?: The authorities presented Mauritanian company SOGECO, owned by the family of opposition leader and FNDD rotating President Abdel Koudouss Abeidna, with a fine for over three million USD. SOGECO is accused of transporting damaged Pakistani rice into

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Mauritania. Abeidna told PolOff that SOGECO provided the containers in which the rice, a donation from the Pakistani government, was transported but that normally the company should not be held liable for the quality of the goods stored in its containers. Many, including Abeidna - a SOGECO board member - believe the fine is politically motivated -- payback for Abeidna's role in opposing the August 6, 2008 coup d'etat and his refusal to accept Aziz's July 18 victory. SOGECO has not paid the fine.

¶10. (U) Revelations of a drug lord: On August 19, alleged drug-trafficker Eric Walter - currently under arrest in Mauritania -- admitted to managing a drug-trafficking network spanning from South America to Europe, via Mauritania. Walter talked about activities he carried out in support of the network including laundering large sums of money, building an airstrip in the desert for small aircraft, and distributing drugs through Nouakchott's Moroccan vegetable market. Walter identified Mauritanian citizens Mini Ould Soudani and former Interpol agent Sid'Ahmed Ould Taya as the individuals who helped him establish the network (Ref B).

¶11. (U) Drug-trafficking scandal continued: In August, Senegalese security services arrested Walter's right hand man, Seydou Kane, a fugitive since 2007. Kane faces extradition to Mauritania to be judged for attempting to murder drug network member Mini Ould Soudani as part of a drug-related retribution scandal.

¶12. (U) More appointments: Bal Amadou Tidiane, Minister of Justice during the Transitional Government of National Unity, was appointed President of the Supreme Court on August 23. Tidiane is an Afro Mauritanian lawyer from Kaedi. He was president of the High Authority of the Press and Audiovisual (HAPA) from 2005-2007. Taleb Ould Abdi Vall was appointed Director General of SNIM. Vall was director general of Somelec in the post-coup period. Sid'Ahmed Ould Raiss, Finance Minister in the post-coup period, was nominated Governor of the Central Bank on August 14. These appointments follow the designation of President Aziz's new cabinet on August 11 (Ref C).

¶13. (U) Aziz travels to Libya: President Aziz arrived in

Tripoli on August 30 to attend the special African Union summit on conflict in Africa and the fortieth anniversary of Libya's September First Revolution. This is President Aziz's first international visit since his inauguration. Mauritania and Libya have signed cooperation agreements in many fields, including cultural and commercial. On the economic front, both countries agreed to the need for increased Libyan investments. Furthermore, Libya has decided to exempt Mauritania from paying interest on loans signed since July 18, 1973. Both countries are looking into developing cooperation in fishing and promoting small and medium businesses.

¶14. (U) Coup d'etat against Boulkheir: On August 26, press published reports stating that the parliamentary majority had devised a strategy to depose National Assembly President Messaoud Ould Boulkheir. Allegedly, President Aziz intends to call the National Assembly for an ordinary session. Boulkheir's absence would allow the majority deputies to ask the Constitutional Council to declare his position vacant, which would open the door to elections to fill the vacancy. Boulkheir has remained quiet since the election and it remains unclear what strategy he has relative to the opening of parliament.

¶15. (U) The press protests: On September 1, The Association of Independent Press of Mauritania protested against "interference of the Ministry of Communications in the appointment procedures of representatives" for the press delegation accompanying President Aziz to Libya. Traditionally, the Association --and not the ministry -- appoints journalists who travel with the president. The ministry declined to share which criteria it used to appoint the journalists.

¶16. (U) Nouadhibou drug seizure: On August 27, Mauritanian gendarmes arrested Moroccan citizen Mohamed Ali Khreibich for transporting two tons of hashish. The drug, which was divided in packages of 25 kilograms, was transported in a truck carrying onions and potatoes from Morocco.

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